

9-20-2013

# Stalk Breakage and Rot Caused by Physoderma in Iowa

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## Recommended Citation

Robertson, Alison E.; Mueller, Daren S.; Saalau Rojas, Erika; and Munkvold, Gary P., "Stalk Breakage and Rot Caused by Physoderma in Iowa" (2013). *Integrated Crop Management News*. Paper 20.

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## Integrated Crop Management NEWS

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### Stalk Breakage and Rot Caused by Physoderma in Iowa

By Alison Robertson, Daren Mueller, Erika Salaau-Rojas and Gary Munkvold, Department of Plant Pathology and Microbiology

An unusual disease has been reported in several fields in southwest and western Iowa over the past couple of weeks. Several samples were received in the Plant Disease and Insect Clinic and pathologists from ISU Extension and Outreach visited a field in Adair County.

#### Symptoms and signs of the disease

First symptoms noticed are plants that break at the first or second node (Figure 1). The nodes at which breakage occurs are black (Figure 2) and some stalk rot of the pith may be present (Figure 3). Microscopic examination of the symptomatic tissue reveals thousands of light brown sporangia (Figure 4 and 5). This has been confirmed as *Physoderma maydis*. This fungus also causes the more familiar *Physoderma* brown spot (Figure 6); however, the foliar symptoms have not been widely prevalent in fields with the stalk rot.

There are a couple of reports of stalk breakage and rot caused by *Physoderma*. In Illinois, severe outbreaks with up to 80 percent lodging in some fields were reported in the early 1970s (Burns and Shurtleff, 1973). There are also reports from North Carolina in 1919 (Tisdale, 1919) and Mississippi in 1957 (Broyles, 1959).

*Physoderma* is not usually an economic problem in Iowa or the United States. In recent years, we have seen an increase in the occurrence of *Physoderma* brown spot on leaves. This may be related to hybrid genetics or the wet springs we have had.

Sporangia can overwinter in soil and infected tissues. Under wet weather conditions, this pathogen produces swimming zoospores and, consequently, free water is necessary for infection to occur. The risk of infection increases at moderate temperatures (73-86° F) and when rainwater sits in the whorl for a period of time. Moreover, young plants are more susceptible to disease but become more resistant with age.

In order to reduce the risk of infection, choose resistant hybrids and avoid planting susceptible hybrids in poorly-drained areas. Crop rotation and tillage practices may reduce sources of inoculum from soil and infected plant debris.



**Figure 1. Stalk breakage caused by *Physoderma maydis* in the field**



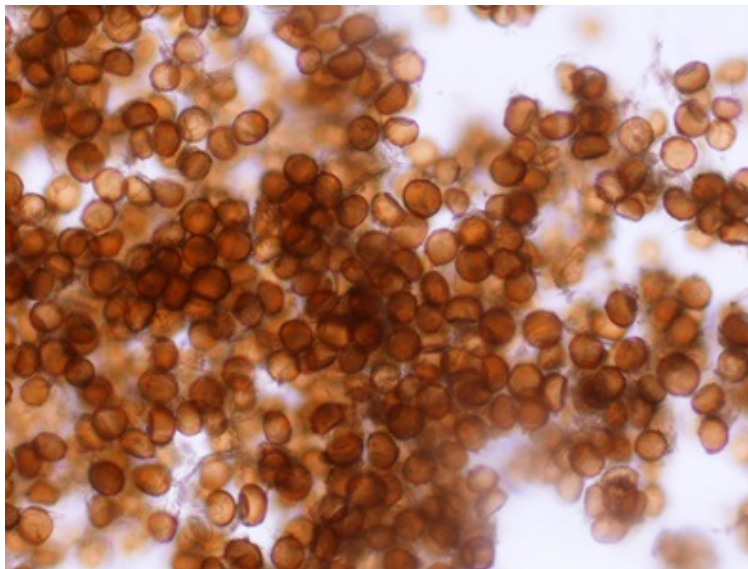
**Figure 2. Dark lesions girdling the lower nodes of affected plants**



**Figure 3. Stalk rot associated with infection by *Physoderma maydis***



**Figure 4. Light brown sporangia of *Physoderma maydis* in infected stalk tissue**



**Figure 5. Microscopic view of sporangia of *Physoderma maydis***





**Figure 6. Typical leaf symptoms of *Physoderma* brown spot**

## References

- Burns and Shurtleff. 1973. Plant Dis. Rep. 27:630-633  
 Tisdale. 1919. Phytopathology 9:51-51  
 Broyles. 1959. Plant Dis. Rep. 43:18-21

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Last Updated 9/23/2013